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ABSTRACT

Current census data make clear that California's poor are poorer today than they were 10 years ago. In particular, data indicate that single working women with children earn less than working, married women with children. Because California's state-subsidized day care system directs programs to enroll children on the waiting list who are from families of lowest income, it can be concluded that subsidized programs are serving poorer families than were enrolled in the late 1970s. Deeper poverty suggests that ancillary aspects of day care programs, such as meals, health and dental care, and support services for parents, have become increasingly important to children. Provision of such services makes increasing demands on staff time and program resources. The reduction in availability of services from the federal and local governments complicates the problem. It is concluded that demands for child care services will remain high throughout California for the forseeable future, and that a significant part of the demand will be for either inexpensive or subsidized care. Facts that child care advocates should make clear to policy makers are pointed out. Objectives and activities of the Children's Roundtable Project of the California Children's Council are described and Roundtable participants are listed. (RH)

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A REPORT

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FAMILY, CHILDREN, AND POVERTY: CAN DATA TELL US ANYTHING?

A REPORT FROM
THE ROUNDTABLE PROJECT OF THE
CALIFORNIA CHILDREN'S COUNCIL

1988

ES 3.11

Families, Children, and Poverty: Can Data Tell Us Anything?

Federal and State reports tell us that family income is not rising during this decade as it did during the post-war boom from 1946 through the mid-to-late 1970s. In addition to a slowing in the growth of family income during this decade, we also see in California a loss in real purchasing power among our poorest families. [Tables I and II reprint tables which capture the changes in family income in the United States and in California.]

TABLE I

Mean Income of U.S. Families with Children by Income Quintile 1973-1984 (in 1984 dollars)

	Mean Income of Quintile:					Mean of All Families
	1	2	3	4	5	
All Families With Children						
1973	9,308	20,678	28,988	38,796	63,258	32,306
1979	8,057	19,179	28,855	38,203	61,256	31,138
1984	6,142	16,491	25,836	36,967	62,198	29,527
Percentage Change						
1973-1984	-34.0	-20.2	-10.9	-4.7	-1.7	-8.3
1979-1984	-23.8	-14.0	-10.5	-3.2	+1.5	-5.2

Source: Joint Economic Committee of the United States Congress.

In this brief paper, we look at the composition of those families that are at the lower end of the income spectrum.

Population Increases

The population of children, ages birth through nine years of age, is increasing during this decade more rapidly than is California's general population.

Table II

Family Income in California, 1977 - 1986
(Constant 1985 Dollars)

	Median Income of Quintile:				
	1	2	3	4	5
All Families With Children					
1977	**$9,796**	**18,988**	**28,879**	**39,783**	**61,167**
1978	9,915	19,137	30,113	41,697	62,964
1979	9,800	19,827	30,113	43,129	67,110
1980	9,639	19,413	29,703	43,734	69,675
1981	9,396	19,148	29,050	41,233	63,254
1982	8,406	17,678	27,663	39,934	65,401
1983	8,211	17,354	27,116	39,857	67,223
1984	8,274	17,672	27,493	40,131	66,813
1985	9,098	19,280	29,029	41,943	68,488
1986	**8,919**	**19,682**	**29,892**	**43,673**	**69,662**
NET CHANGE	-9.0%	+3.7%	+3.5%	+10.0%	+14.0%

Source: Current Population Survey, California State Census Data Center

The California Department of Finance projects that the population of California will reach nearly 29 million individuals by 1990, a 21% increase over the State's 1980 population of nearly 24 million.

Between 1980 and 1990, the population of children under ten years of age will grow by 38% (from 3.4 million to almost 4.7 million). [Table III summarizes this projected population growth.]

Table III

Projected Increases in the Population
of California's Children 1980 - 1990

Number of Children	1980	1990	Change
1-4	1,716,385	2,278,918	+32.8%
5-9	1,658,039	2,383,786	+43.8%
Total	3,374,424	4,662,704	+38.2%

Source:Population Projections for California Counties 1980-2020, Department of Finance, December, 1986

This rapid increase in the number of children who are of prime child care age is putting pressure on child care programs and on the child care industry to expand services and to add new centers and family day care homes; this pressure to serve more children will certainly last through the end of the decade.

Poverty Statistics

If there were a city of California's poor young children, five years of age and younger, it would rank as California's fifth largest, surpassed only by Los Angeles, San Diego, San Jose, and San Francisco. Imagine those children in school: they fill 21,515 classrooms of thirty children each, every one of whom returns home to poverty every day.

Using the federal definition of poverty, which may well be artificially low and therefore underestimate poor individuals and poor families, California saw its poor increase from 2.6 million individuals in 1980 to 4,000,000 individuals in 1984 -- this represents a staggering 51% increase during a period when the state's population increased by less than 10%.

The percentages of the California population who live in poverty increased from 11.4 per cent in 1980 to 15.8 per cent in 1984. By 1985 there was relatively better news when the percentage of Californian's living below poverty dipped to 14.2, which represents 3,607,000 individuals.

Of those Californians living in poverty, 645,440 are children five and under. This figure represents 25% of the preschool children in the state. One out of every four California children under six lived in poverty in 1985. Forty seven of California's fifty eight counties have fewer than 645,000 persons. More young children live in poverty than the total population of Kern, of Fresno, of Ventura, or of San Mateo county.

The 25 percent rate of poverty is also extraordinary. It is nearly double the general poverty rate in California of 14.1%, making young children one of the groups at highest risk of poverty in the entire society. In discussions of "poverty," one sometimes forgets what the federal definition is supposed to describe: while the federal Orshansky poverty index is somewhat complicated, it comes down to describing a situation in which a family does not have enough food because a minimal food budget is sacrificed to pay for other essentials. If the federal poverty level is accurate, then it is in fact an index of hunger and of insufficient nutrition.

The thought that one in four children under six years of age may be going without enough to eat is a frightening one: the importance of good nutrition for pregnant and lactating women and for infants and young children is without debate. At no other times in life is diet as critical. Even without discussing complex neurological events, such as myelination (the growth and development of nerve cells), which occur primarily in young children and have a life-long effect on a person, no one questions the need for proper nutrition in the youngest members of society if they are to grow into healthy, capable adults. To consign one in four young people to inadequate nutrition is nothing short of a societal felony.

One other set of poverty statistics is important to examine here: the number of families headed by a single parent. The younger the child, the more likely the single parent lives in poverty. In 1986, the Current Population Survey found that 160,900 female headed households in California had a child under six years of age and lived in poverty. These poor families represented 59% of the single-parent families with young children. Households with older children fared slightly better: 300,000 female-headed households with children under eighteen lived in poverty. These families accounted for 46% of the female-headed families with children. A quicker way to put it is this: three out of five single parent families with young children live in poverty; and, almost half of the single parent families with children live in poverty.

While single parents, particularly those with young children, have a difficult time escaping poverty, two parent families continue to remain in the majority. In 1985, single parent families comprised 35% of the families in the bottom 40% of income in California; two-parent families were 65% of the same low-income group.

The Wages of Working Women

Women make less than men. This is so for many reasons, including what the Wall Street Journal likes to call "the forces of the marketplace." While issues of general pay equity are intractable

if not insoluble, another important set of issues arise from data comparing the pay of various groups of women.

For this paper, the most important finding is that single women who have children and who work earn less than working, married women with children. It is true for those working full time and it is true for those working part time.

TABLE IV

The Wages of Married and Single Mothers

Hours Worked Per Week	Hourly Wage of Married Women With Children Under 18		Hourly Wage of Single Women With Children Under 18	
	1985	1986	1985	1986
35+	$7.57	$7.32	$5.76	$6.40
20-34	$6.93	$7.20	$5.80	$6.38
0-19	$6.90	$7.07	$5.53	$5.00

Source: Current Population Survey

> [As one would expect, the average hourly wage of a single mother with a child under six years of age is less than that of single mothers with children under 18. While the data base may not be large enough for exact comparison, the wages of single women with young children are roughly 20% less than single mothers in general. Most of this difference between the wages of all single mothers and those with younger children is probably attributable to the younger ages of mothers with younger children--these mothers are generally early in their careers with proportionately lower wages.]

It is the disparity between all working mothers' income and the average income of single working mothers that is important to acknowledge even if the explanation is unclear. In some of these comparison groups in Table IV, married women with children have wages 30 percent above that of single women with children. One implication of this disparity is that demand for subsidized child care increases: women with the lowest incomes are those who are single--are those without mates who can share the child care responsibilities. A single parent is also likely to have fewer alternatives to formal child care and the fewer means for purchasing child care while she works.

Employment Patterns of Women with Children

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single woman in possession of a child, must be in want of a job. The truth is, in fact, less clever: women with children are in the workforce in unprecedented numbers; while many are employed part time, many

more are working at least 35 hours each week; and, as noted above, the more vulnerable the family, the lower are the wages and household incomes of working mothers. The implications for child care are obvious, central, and enormous.

In California, in the mid-1980s, about half of the single mothers with children under the age of six were in the work force. That's 80,000 to 100,000 women who are working; and, about 75 percent of them are working full time. Given an average wage of $5 to $6 an hour, we can estimate that at least 60,000 young children, with mothers who work full time, are growing up in households with incomes less than $11,000 a year.

These young children almost assuredly need child care; their mothers' budgets allow little to pay for that care; and the alternative, if their mothers' are eligible, are small AFDC grants. So, here are families who place major demands upon the State's subsidized child care programs.

So do many of the 80,000 to 100,000 single women with young children who are not in the workforce. Some of them attend college or another training program; others would look for work if they could secure subsidized care for their child. As society acknowledges the vast number of mothers who have young children and who are in the workforce, society in turn uses public policy to place additional pressures on single mothers to enter the workforce.

One can see this pressure at work in California's recent welfare reform package, called GAIN, requiring some AFDC recipients to enter job search and job training programs in order to maintain their welfare eligibility. National proposals, particularly those promoted by House Republicans, call for similar measures directed at mothers who receive welfare payments and whose children are as young as six months old. These proposals at least acknowledge the need for reimbursement for minimal child care expenses.

In addition to the single mothers (with young children) who are in the workforce and those who will be pushed into it by economic forces, there are greater numbers of working married women with children and single mothers whose children are of school age. In the mid-1980s, 700,000 married mothers with young children were in the workforce, and an additional 825,000 women whose youngest child was at least six years of age were also working outside the home. About one-quarter of those working mothers with older children were single.

From these mothers with children of school age come the demands both for recreation programs and for more formalized "latchkey" programs. From the 700,000 working mothers with young children come the demands for infant and preschool care that overwhelm our current resources.

Last of all, it is important to note a generally ignored shift in women's employment patterns. The California Senate Office of Research notes that the most significant change in women's employment over the past ten years has not been in income or in numbers of percentages in the workforce, but in the growth in the number of mothers now working full time.

Conclusions

It is little wonder, given the numbers of children who live in poverty and the numbers of women, particularly single mothers, who work full time at low wages, that subsidized child care programs have long waiting lists and serve families under more and more economic stress.

The census data make clear that California's poor are a poorer group than those who were at the bottom of the economic ladder ten years ago. Because our state-subsidized system directs programs to enroll the child on the waiting list who is from the lowest income family, it is safe to conclude that our subsidized programs are serving poorer families than were enrolled late in the 1970s. This increasing poverty suggests that several program aspects have become more important to children's well-being: the meals served, the health screenings provided, the referrals for medical care and for ancillary services such as dental care and speech therapy, and the support services for parents.

These services are, by their nature, ancillary to a good curriculum and to providing a safe and supportive environment for play and learning. Yet, they are taking more and more time of program directors and teachers and more and more resources of the child care programs. All this during a period when the availability of these services from the federal and local governments have been reduced. For example, since 1981, the federal child care food program has moved from reimbursing up to three meals and two snacks per day for eligible children to reimbursing for no more than two meals and one snack. And everyone remembers when pickles and catsup were named vegetables of the year by White House dietitians.

And, it should be obvious from even this cursory look at census data that demand for child care services will remain high throughout California for the foreseeable future, and that a significant part of this demand will be for either cheap or subsidized care.

Recommendations

Whatever other strategies exist to end poverty, there is consensus that child care is an important service which government must make available to poor families. Given the significance of child care in any approach to reducing the number

of children in poverty, it is important for child care advocates to make a few things clear to policy makers:

- The increasing numbers of poor children and the increasing impoverishment of these families puts new demands on child care programs, particularly subsidized programs. These demands are not merely new families on the waiting list, but children and families enrolled in care who have fewer and fewer other resources.

- These needy families ask more and more of child care programs: social and health services or referrals, extra nutrition, vigilance against neglect, assistance with housing and employment, and attention to the intellectual development of the children in care.

- Standards and reimbursement levels should recognize the increasing poverty of service recipients and the increasing demands on child care providers to provide much more than custodial care while parents work.

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This report was prepared by the California Children's Council as part of its Children's Roundtable project. The project was funded by the James Irvine Foundation. Reproduction of the report is freely granted by the Council.

The California Children's Council
Children's Roundtable Project

The California Children's Council is a non-profit corporation dedicated to the public benefit in the arena of children's services. It incorporated in 1983, with the core of its original board of directors coming from the membership and staff of the State of California's Governor's Advisory Committee on Child Development during the years 1977 to 1985.

The Council is organized to serve the children and families of California by promoting appropriate research, consultation, and public education which recognize and build upon the competence of parents. The Council works to achieve this goal by:

- Instructing and training individuals to improve their abilities and to develop their capabilities to work with young children and their families.
- Instructing the public about early childhood development and thereby benefiting the community through increased understanding of the needs of young children.
- Publishing educational materials in the public interest.
- Conducting public discussion groups, panels, workshops and conferences on topics within the field of early childhood development.
- Providing management consultation and other technical assistance to human service organization.
- Promoting and conducting research and public education in child development, child care, and special education.

Recently, two of the Council's principal activities have been annual "Care for the Children" activities and a special project called the California Children's Roundtable. The "Care for the Children" events have included family picnics, marches, and press conferences, all organized as public education activities in the realms of family life and child care needs. The Children's Roundtable is a policy seminar conducted with resources provided by the James Irvine Foundation. Through the Roundtable, the Council was able to complete a set of issue papers on topics important to child care and public policy; a photo essay on poverty, work, and family life; and the design for a study of parental attitudes toward school readiness and the "hurried child."

Additional information on the Roundtable projects can be obtained by writing to the Council, 17516 Labrador St., Northridge, CA 91325.

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